

Childfree Decisions Among Married Couples: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review explores the motivations, experiences, and societal contexts influencing the decision of married couples to remain childfree. Drawing on eight empirical studies published between 2015 and 2023, the review identifies four central themes: personal and career-driven motivations, lived emotional and relational experiences, cultural and religious contexts, and coping mechanisms shaped by intersectionality. Findings reveal that childfree decisions are often grounded in rational considerations such as autonomy, financial constraints, health concerns, and fear of responsibility. Cultural and religious expectations, particularly in collectivist and pronatalist societies, continue to exert pressure on childfree individuals, leading to social stigma and emotional conflict. However, many report a sense of empowerment and well-being when supported by like-minded communities and partners. The review highlights the limited representation of perspectives from low- and middle-income countries and marginalized groups. It calls for more inclusive and intersectional research to deepen our understanding of reproductive autonomy in diverse global contexts.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by systematically reviewing childfree decisions among married couples, focusing on motivations, experiences, and societal influences. It is one of the few studies that synthesize diverse findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the childfree phenomenon in contemporary marital contexts.

1. Introduction

Throughout the cultures around the world, having children has long been considered a normative life path expectation, particularly within the institution of marriage. The word "childfree" refers to persons or couples who deliberately choose not to have children, as opposed to those who are involuntarily childless owing to medical or

situational causes (Usman et al., 2023). In many cultural and theological traditions, procreation is tied to marital purpose, moral duty, and social identity. Parenthood is typically portrayed as a natural extension of adulthood, a method of meeting familial expectations, and a road toward personal legacy. Childbearing is frequently viewed as a divine command or blessing by religious people, particularly those of the Abrahamic faith (Ahmad Soleh Hasibuan & Aminah Lubis, 2023). Ethically, raising the next generation is perceived by many as a contribution to societal continuity and moral responsibility. However, shifting societal norms, rising individualism, and increased access to education and reproductive autonomy have led to growing visibility and acceptance of the childfree choice, though not without considerable debate and resistance.

The reasons behind, experiences with, and consequences of being childfree have been examined in an increasing amount of literature. Scholars have examined the psychological, economic, cultural, and gendered dimensions that influence the voluntary decision not to have children. According to (Gillespie, 2003), two core rationales often emerge among childfree individuals: rejection of motherhood or fatherhood as a central identity, and the prioritization of personal freedom and lifestyle autonomy. These findings align with Symbolic Interactionism, which suggests that individuals construct meaning around parenthood based on personal, societal, and relational interactions. In addition, the stigma surrounding childfree choices also emerges as a recurring theme. (Donath, 2015) explores how women who opt out of motherhood are often perceived as deviant or emotionally deficient, especially in pronatalist cultures where female identity is tightly bound to reproduction. In patriarchal societies, such as parts of South Asia, this decision may lead to social exclusion, marital strain, or even legal and familial repercussions (Aini & Ismail, 2025). Similarly, (Park, 2014) found that childfree couples frequently encounter moral questioning, where their decision is interpreted as selfish or unnatural, particularly in communities with strong religious or cultural pronatalist ideologies.

Research also has looked at the decision's economic and psychological justifications as well as the reactions it elicits in society. According to research by Rebecca (Harrington, 2019), the desire for autonomy, career aspirations, and the high expense of living are all factors contributing to the growth in childfree choices in Western nations. The choice to forgo having children is seen in sociological theory, especially the Rational Choice Theory, as the result of cost-benefit analysis, in which people balance the perceived benefits of parenting against the sacrifices of time, money, and personal freedom. According to earlier research, people without children frequently experience social stigma, particularly women who are perceived as unfulfilled or self-centred (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017). Despite such stigma, some research supports that childfree adults can experience high levels of life satisfaction, autonomy, and well-being.

However, choosing to live childfree raises enormous social difficulties. An increasing number of people indicate a desire to avoid becoming parents for not just temporarily, but permanently. This phenomenon has far-reaching ramifications for societal structures. Demographically, decreased birth rates can lead to an aging population and a shrinking workforce, putting a pressure on national resources and social welfare programs (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017). Socially, the deterioration of conventional family patterns can result in intergenerational gaps and the breakdown of kinship networks. Furthermore, the motivations for childfree decisions, particularly among young adults, are frequently linked to rising career aspirations, overwhelming financial

demands, mental health issues, aversion to responsibility, or unresolved childhood trauma (Höglund & Hildingsson, 2023). These factors highlight a shift in societal values and a transformation of the conventional meaning of family and adulthood.

Recently, the childfree trend has become increasingly popular, especially among young married couples. This phenomenon has raised concerns within society due to its long-term impact on social structure locally and globally (Stahnke et al., 2020). This trend is growing rapidly in the mid-20th century particularly in the West which most of the spouse decided not to have children. In contrast, the society was inclined to have children in earlier times. This shift stems from social evolution, economic, and cultural trends, which distanced society from *fitra* where men as husbands, were responsible as the primary providers (Hariri et al., 2021). Meanwhile, women as wife's role was to bear and raise children. Furthermore, the economy changes and industrial sector eventually forcing them to choose between career and motherhood. Nowadays, the trend is no longer just a choice of not having children but has evolved into a lifestyle influenced by an ideology that advocates freedom, with the slogan "My body is my right" (McCormack & Graham, 2024). This lifestyle promotes the idea that life can be better without the responsibilities and commitments associated with having children.

1.1. Research Objectives

- i. To identify the key motivations influencing married couples to choose a childfree lifestyle.
- ii. To examine the lived experiences of childfree individuals within marital relationships.
- iii. To analyse the societal, cultural, and religious factors shaping childfree decisions.
- iv. To explore the implications of the childfree lifestyle on individual well-being and social structures.

2. Literature Review

The concept of voluntary childlessness, commonly referred to as the childfree lifestyle, has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Previous studies have explored this phenomenon from psychological, sociological, and economic perspectives. One of the dominant explanations is rooted in Rational Choice Theory, which suggests that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, weighing the perceived advantages and disadvantages of parenthood.

Research indicates that motivations for remaining childfree often include the desire for personal freedom, career advancement, financial stability, and avoidance of parental responsibilities. According to Kreyenfeld and Konietzka (2017), economic uncertainty and rising living costs significantly influence reproductive decisions, particularly among younger generations. Similarly, Harrington (2019) highlights that career aspirations and lifestyle preferences play a major role in delaying or rejecting parenthood.

From a sociocultural perspective, the decision to remain childfree is often met with social stigma, especially in pronatalist societies where parenthood is considered a social norm. Donath (2015) found that women who choose not to have children are frequently labelled as deviant or selfish. This stigma is further intensified in collectivist cultures, where familial expectations and religious beliefs strongly emphasise procreation as a moral obligation.

In addition, gender plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of childfree individuals. Women, in particular, face greater societal pressure due to traditional expectations surrounding motherhood. Studies have shown that childfree women are often judged more harshly compared to men, reflecting deeply rooted gender norms and inequalities.

Despite these challenges, several studies report positive outcomes associated with the childfree lifestyle. Individuals who choose to remain childfree often experience higher levels of autonomy, life satisfaction, and relationship stability. The presence of supportive partners and communities further enhances their well-being.

Overall, the literature suggests that the childfree decision is complex and influenced by a combination of personal, economic, cultural, and social factors. However, there remains a lack of research focusing on diverse cultural contexts, particularly in developing countries, highlighting the need for more inclusive and intersectional studies.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Selection of the Review Protocol

The study adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) as the guiding framework to identify, screen, and analyze research related to factors influencing the childfree lifestyle. The PRISMA guidelines outline four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, which improve transparency and replicability in systematic reviews (PRISMA, 2021). By adhering to PRISMA standards, this review ensures that the reporting quality is high and that readers can accurately assess the validity and applicability of the findings.

Data were retrieved from two major databases: Scopus and Web of Science, both recognized for their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed research in the social sciences, humanities, and behavioral studies. These databases were chosen to ensure broad and credible representation of global literature on voluntary childlessness and the childfree phenomenon.

3.2. Development of Research Questions

The research question for this review was developed using the Population, Interest, and Context (PICo) framework, which helps ensure focus and clarity in qualitative systematic reviews (Methley et al., 2014). Within this framework:

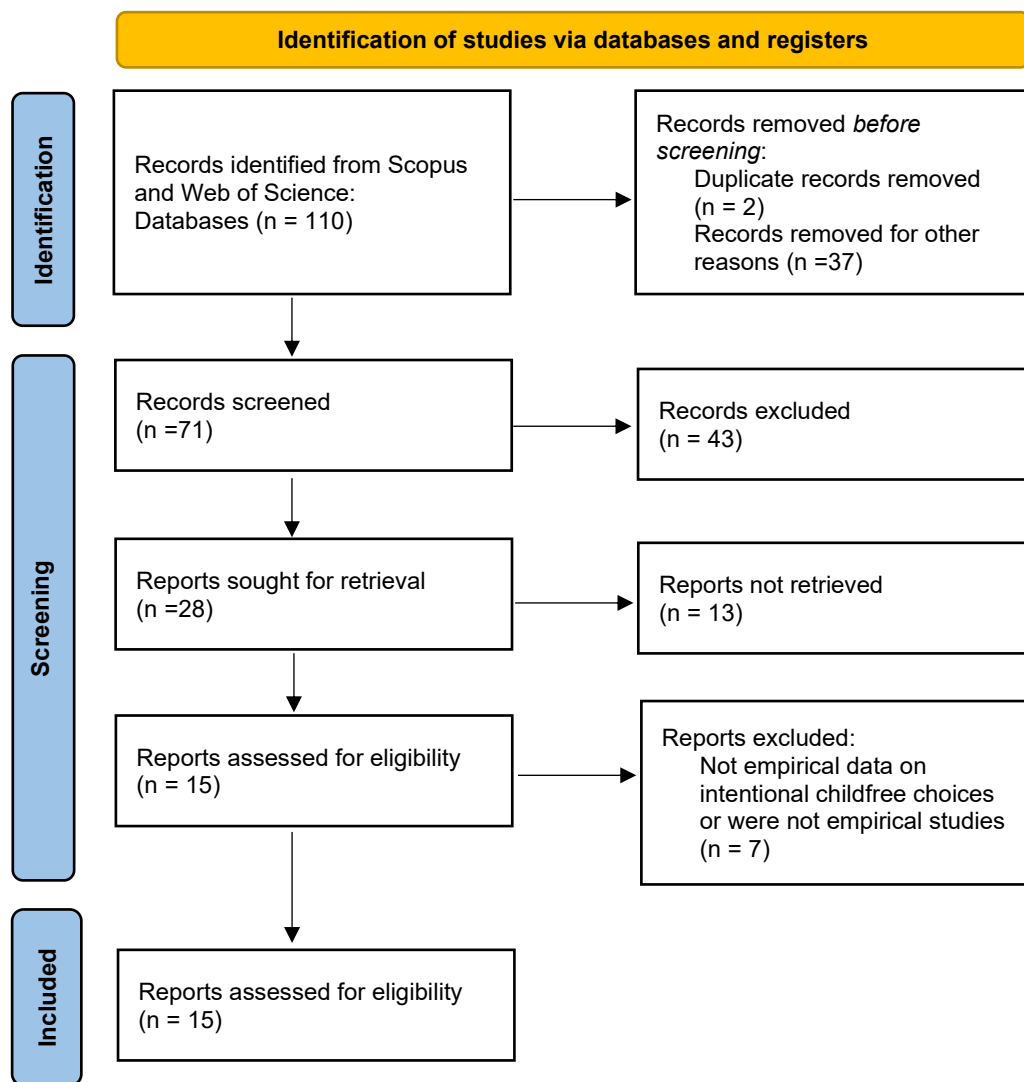
- i. Population (P): individuals or couples who choose to be childfree
- ii. Interest (I): factors influencing their decision to remain childfree
- iii. Context (Co): the broader societal, cultural, and familial environment in which this decision occurs.

Based on these components, the main research question was formulated as: "What are the influencing factors and societal impacts of the childfree lifestyle among individuals and couples?" This question guided the scope, inclusion criteria, and synthesis of the selected studies.

3.3. Systematic Searching Strategy

The systematic search was conducted in three key phases: identification, screening, and eligibility, following PRISMA procedures (Page et al., 2021). Figure 1 illustrates the flow of study selection. During the identification phase, a total of 110 articles were retrieved 88 from Scopus and 22 from Web of Science using predefined search strings. The screening process then excluded irrelevant items such as books, editorials, and non-English articles. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 8 empirical studies were retained for final synthesis.

Figure 1: Flow diagram of included studies



To conduct a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on factors influencing the childfree lifestyle, the use of Scopus and Web of Science databases provides extensive coverage and reliable scholarly sources. Scopus is among the largest abstract and citation databases, encompassing a broad range of disciplines such as social sciences, economics, and public health (Wohlin et al., 2022). Its extensive indexing of peer-reviewed literature ensures access to high-quality empirical studies and systematic reviews exploring the motivations, patterns, and social perceptions associated with the decision to remain childfree. Furthermore, Scopus offers robust citation analysis tools, enabling researchers to identify influential studies and emerging trends within the field.

Similarly, Web of Science is a multidisciplinary platform that provides access to a wide range of academic journals, books, and primary sources across the humanities and social sciences. It is particularly valuable for offering historical, sociological, and theoretical perspectives, making it an essential resource for examining the ethical, cultural, and religious dimensions of voluntary childlessness (Tóth et al., 2023). The curated and high-impact collections within Web of Science enhance the credibility and academic depth of the literature selected for this review.

The inclusion of high-impact scholarly articles ensures that the literature incorporated in this review is both reputable and relevant. By combining Scopus and Web of Science, this study adopts a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach, enabling an in-depth analysis of childfree choices from both empirical and theoretical perspectives while ensuring the credibility and rigor of the systematic literature review.

The first phase of the SLR involved identifying appropriate keywords and constructing precise search strings for the database search. After careful deliberation, the key search terms were determined, as illustrated in Table 1. The initial search yielded 88 articles from Scopus and 22 articles from Web of Science. Subsequently, a detailed review protocol was developed to outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria, databases searched, search strategies, and procedures for data extraction and analysis.

For the literature search, key terms and their synonyms related to the research question were identified, including “childfree,” “voluntarily childless,” “childlessness,” and “childless by choice.” Additional terms such as “married couple,” “spouse,” and “partner” were incorporated to narrow the focus to individuals within marital or long-term partnerships. Keywords related to influencing factors—such as “motivation,” “reason,” and “decision-making”—were also included to capture the underlying rationale behind the childfree decision.

These keywords were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to construct comprehensive search strings, such as:

((“childfree” OR “voluntary childlessness” OR “childless by choice”) AND (“married couple” OR “spouse” OR “partner”) AND (“motivation” OR “reason” OR “decision-making”) AND (“socio-economic” OR “economic factor”)).

This approach ensured a broad yet focused retrieval of relevant literature, enabling systematic identification of studies addressing both the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of the childfree lifestyle.

The second stage of the review process was screening. After the relevant articles were retrieved based on the specified keywords, duplicates were removed, and the remaining records were screened for relevance. Following a careful screening process, 80 records were excluded, including books, book chapters, editorials, and non-English publications. Articles that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were retained for further assessment and listed in the Supplementary File.

The third stage involved assessing eligibility, during which the full texts of the remaining articles were examined for content relevance and methodological rigor. After detailed evaluation, 13 articles were excluded because they did not adequately address the concepts of voluntary childlessness or the childfree lifestyle. Consequently, 17 articles were retained for in-depth review.

Upon closer examination, nine of these articles were subsequently excluded for lack of empirical evidence or focus on intentional childfree decisions. Ultimately, eight articles met all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the qualitative synthesis, with three employing qualitative methods, four quantitative, and one utilizing a mixed-methods design.

Table 1: Keywords And Information Searching Strategy Example

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY("childfree" OR "voluntary childlessness" OR "childless by choice") AND ("married couple" OR "spouse" OR "partner") AND ("motivation" OR "reason" OR "decision-making") AND ("socio-economic" OR "economic factor")
Web of Science	TS=("childfree" OR "voluntary childlessness" OR "childless by choice") AND TS=("married couple" OR "spouse" OR "partner") AND TS=("motivation" OR "reason" OR "decision-making") AND TS=("socio-economic" OR "economic factor")

To ensure comprehensiveness and relevance, a systematic literature review (SLR) on the childfree lifestyle and its societal implications necessitates a series of structured steps. Following predetermined inclusion criteria, the screening phase aims to effectively eliminate studies that are clearly irrelevant (Carrera-Rivera et al., 2022). Initially, the titles and abstracts of all retrieved studies are examined to determine eligibility. Studies that do not meet the core requirements are excluded.

The inclusion criteria for this review are as follows: only open-access studies are considered to guarantee full-text availability; the literature type is restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles, excluding other sources such as books, conference proceedings, or theses; only studies published in English are examined to maintain consistency and ensure accurate comprehension. Furthermore, publications from 2015 to 2025 are included to capture the most recent and significant research in the field. Additionally, studies must fall within the disciplines of Anthropology, Sociology, Social Sciences, Psychology, Arts and Humanities, and Environmental Science to ensure relevance to the research topic.

Moreover, each study's relevance will be evaluated based on its exploration of motivations, consequences, or societal perceptions associated with the childfree decision. The quality of publications is also assessed by verifying whether the study appears in a peer-reviewed journal or other recognized academic sources. This screening process produces a refined set of studies that satisfy the inclusion criteria and are suitable for detailed analysis, thereby ensuring a thorough and credible systematic literature review.

Table 2: Criteria of Documents

Criteria	Eligibility
Open Access	All open access
Literature type	Article
Language	English
Timeline	2015-2025
Categories	Anthropology, Sociology, Social Sciences, Psychology, Arts and

3.1. Eligibility Phase

The eligibility phase is designed to rigorously assess the studies that passed the initial screening, ensuring their relevance and methodological quality. This involves obtaining and thoroughly reviewing the full texts of the selected studies and evaluating them against more detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria (Mengist et al., 2020).

To be included at this stage, studies must provide empirical evidence related to the childfree lifestyle, examine motivations, decision-making processes, or sociocultural and religious implications, and employ valid and reliable research methodologies. Each study is evaluated based on its alignment with the research objectives, ensuring that it directly addresses the research question.

Emphasis is placed on full-text articles to allow a comprehensive examination of each study's methodology, data, and findings. This process ensures that all included studies present empirical data, utilize appropriate and dependable methods, and provide sufficient detail, thereby contributing to a high-quality and credible systematic literature review (Hamdon & Halim, 2022).

3.2. Appraisal of Quality

The appraisal process involved a thorough examination of each selected study to ensure conceptual clarity regarding the childfree lifestyle, including distinctions such as voluntary childlessness, childless by choice, and intentional childfree living. The evaluation also considered the application of relevant theoretical frameworks, such as Rational Choice Theory, social norms, or gender and cultural perspectives (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Each study was assessed based on the description of its sample population, data collection methods, and analytical rigor. Studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches were included if they utilized valid and reliable instruments and adequately captured key variables, such as motivations, socioeconomic status, social pressures, or religious influences.

Finally, the selected studies were synthesized using a qualitative thematic approach, allowing the identification of overarching themes that emerged across the literature. This process ensured that the review captured both methodological rigor and conceptual depth in examining the childfree phenomenon.

3.3. Data Analysis

The objective of data analysis is to synthesize the extracted data to draw comprehensive and meaningful conclusions regarding the research question. Extracted data were compiled into an Excel spreadsheet for ease of analysis, and studies were grouped by key themes or variables to facilitate comparison and synthesis (Schmidt et al., 2021). Descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the characteristics of the included studies, such as the distribution of study designs, geographic locations, and population characteristics.

Thematic analysis was performed to identify and synthesize common themes and patterns across the studies, focusing on the motivations behind the childfree lifestyle, its

social, ethical, cultural, and religious implications, and any recurring theoretical frameworks related to personal autonomy, gender roles, or societal expectations. If the data permitted, a meta-analysis was conducted to quantitatively synthesize the findings by calculating effect sizes and assessing the overall impact of these variables on the decision to remain childfree. Appropriate statistical software was used to perform the meta-analysis and evaluate heterogeneity among studies (Stack et al., 2020).

3.4. Summary of Selected Studies

A total of eight empirical studies were included in this review, comprising qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. The selected studies covered diverse geographical contexts, including Europe and Asia, and examined various aspects of the childfree phenomenon such as motivations, societal perceptions, and psychological outcomes.

Qualitative studies primarily explored personal experiences, identity construction, and social stigma faced by childfree individuals through interviews and narrative analysis. Quantitative studies utilised survey data to identify patterns and correlations between socioeconomic factors and the decision to remain childfree. Meanwhile, mixed-method studies provided a more comprehensive understanding by combining statistical analysis with in-depth personal accounts.

Overall, these studies highlight recurring themes such as autonomy, financial considerations, cultural expectations, and emotional well-being, which form the basis of the thematic analysis presented in this review.

4. Results

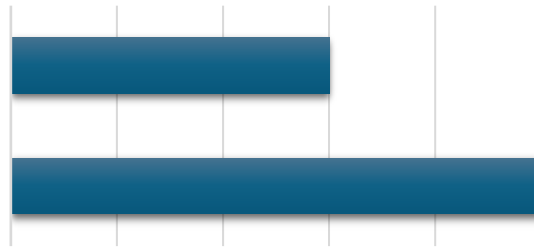
This section should provide a concise and precise description of the results of the research, including the data and their interpretation. For quantitative research, data are best presented using Table and Figure. Nonetheless, Graph can be also presented depending on the types of data. This section may be divided by subheadings. The first and second subheading should look like this:

4.1. Background of the Selected Studies

A total of 8 articles were included in this study following a rigorous and systematic selection process. As shown in Figure 2, the spatial distribution of these studies indicates a notable geographical concentration in Europe and Asia, highlighting the regions where scholarly attention on the childfree lifestyle is most prominent.

Based on the country analysis, European countries contributed the highest number of studies on voluntary childlessness, with articles originating from Belgium (Stegen et al., 2021), Croatia (Štambuk et al., 2019), Hungary (Szalma & Takács, 2015), Sweden (Peterson & Engwall, 2019), and a general reference to Europe (Buhr & Huinink, 2017). This regional concentration highlights a growing academic interest in exploring voluntary childlessness within European sociocultural and policy contexts, where issues such as individual autonomy, gender equality, and demographic change are widely discussed.

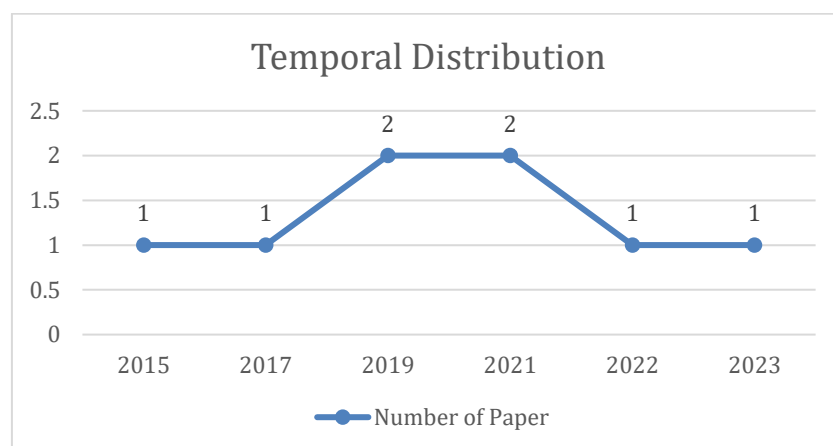
Figure 2: Countries with Largest Number of Articles



In contrast, Asian countries accounted for three studies, specifically from Nepal (Sekine et al., 2021), Israel (Donath et al., 2022), and Indonesia (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023). These studies provide valuable insights into the socio-religious and cultural factors influencing the decision to remain childfree in more traditional and collectivist societies, where religious norms, family expectations, and economic pressures play significant roles in shaping reproductive choices.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the temporal distribution of the selected articles shows a relatively even spread across recent years, reflecting sustained scholarly interest in the childfree phenomenon. The publication timeline spans from 2015 to 2023, with studies consistently emerging each year. The earliest study included in this review was published in 2015 (Szalma & Takács, 2015), followed by another in 2017 (Buhr & Huinink, 2017), which laid foundational discussions on voluntary childlessness and demographic change in Europe. Two studies appeared in 2019 (Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Štambuk et al., 2019), marking a period of increasing academic attention. Another two studies were published in 2021 (Sekine et al., 2021; Stegen et al., 2021), examining motivations and societal implications from both Western and Asian perspectives. Subsequent publications in 2022 (Donath et al., 2022) and 2023 (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023) indicate a continued, though moderate, scholarly engagement in recent years.

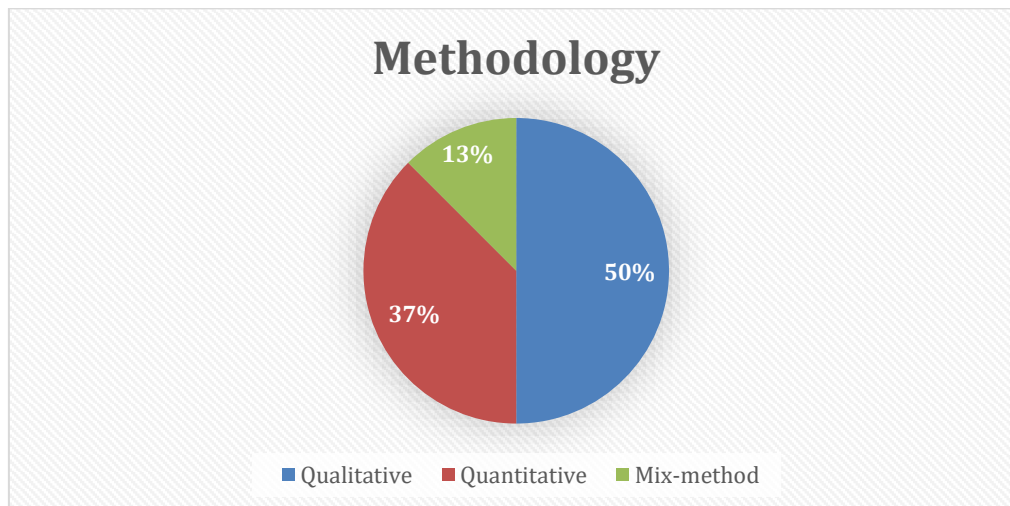
Figure 3: Temporal distribution of selected articles



As illustrated in Figure 4, the methodological distribution of the selected articles reveals a diverse application of research approaches, reflecting the complexity of the childfree phenomenon and the various contexts in which it is studied. The methodologies identified across the nine articles include qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and conceptual/non-empirical approaches. Most studies (4 out of 8) employed qualitative methods (Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Stegen et al., 2021), including

one article that conducted a qualitative synthesis (Donath et al., 2022) of existing narratives and three that used primary qualitative data through life stories, interviews, and interpretive frameworks. These studies offered rich, in-depth insights into personal experiences and social meanings surrounding voluntary childlessness. For example, topics ranged from ambivalence about motherhood to life stories of older childfree individuals and culturally situated motivations for avoiding parenthood. Three studies adopted quantitative approaches (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023; Buhr & Huinink, 2017; Szalma & Takács, 2015), utilizing structured survey data and statistical analyses to examine childfree behavior in relation to broader demographic trends. These included investigations into the reasons behind permanent childlessness, the influence of socioeconomic conditions, and religious interpretations of childfree choices in regions like Hungary and Indonesia. Only one study utilized a mixed methods design, which combined qualitative and quantitative elements (Štambuk et al., 2019), to explore the motivations for parenthood among LGBTIQ individuals. This integrative approach provided a comprehensive lens by balancing numerical trends with personal narratives, highlighting the multidimensional nature of reproductive decisions. The type of method used is depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Method used in selected articles



4.2. Thematic Analysis

The first part of the analysis focused on identifying key elements to understand the multifactorial influences on the decision to remain childfree. Across the selected articles, four central themes were extracted: (a) type of motivation; (b) socio-economic context; (c) relational and cultural influence; and (d) psychological or personal experience, as presented in Table 3. Each theme played a critical role in providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping voluntary childlessness, including internal values, structural constraints, and interpersonal dynamics. The subsequent subthemes further elaborate on the distinctive dimensions of each main theme, offering deeper insight into how individuals navigate the complex decision of choosing a childfree lifestyle.

4.3. Methodological Approaches

As illustrated in Figure 4, the methodological distribution of the selected articles demonstrates a diverse application of research approaches, reflecting the complexity of the childfree phenomenon and the various contexts in which it is studied. Across the

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The majority of studies (4 out of 8) employed qualitative methods (Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Stegen et al., 2021), including one article that conducted a qualitative synthesis (Donath et al., 2022) of existing narratives, and three that used primary qualitative data through life stories, interviews, and interpretive frameworks. These studies provided rich, in-depth insights into personal experiences and the social meanings surrounding voluntary childlessness, covering topics such as ambivalence about motherhood, life stories of older childfree individuals, and culturally situated motivations for avoiding parenthood.

Three studies employed quantitative approaches (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023; Buhr & Huinink, 2017; Szalma & Takács, 2015), utilizing structured survey instruments and statistical analyses to examine childfree behavior in relation to broader demographic, social, and cultural trends. These studies aimed to identify patterns, correlations, and potential causal factors underlying the decision to remain childfree. Specifically, they investigated reasons behind permanent childlessness, including personal choice, health considerations, and fertility limitations, while assessing the influence of socioeconomic conditions such as income, educational attainment, and employment status. Furthermore, some studies explored the role of cultural and religious norms in shaping attitudes toward childlessness, illustrating how interpretations of religious teachings and family expectations influence reproductive choices in contexts such as Hungary and Indonesia. By systematically quantifying these factors, these studies provided robust empirical evidence on the prevalence, determinants, and demographic implications of voluntary childlessness, offering a complementary and more generalizable perspective alongside the in-depth qualitative insights found in other studies.

Only one study employed a mixed methods design (Štambuk et al., 2019), integrating both qualitative and quantitative elements to explore motivations for parenthood among LGBTIQ individuals. This integrative approach provided a more comprehensive perspective by combining statistical analyses of demographic and behavioral patterns with in-depth personal narratives, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complex and multidimensional factors that influence reproductive decisions in this population. The study's design also facilitated the triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and richness of the insights gained.

Overall, the distribution of methodological approaches across the selected studies, summarized in Figure 4, demonstrates a balanced utilization of qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and conceptual approaches. This diversity in research designs highlights the multifaceted nature of the childfree phenomenon, showing that understanding voluntary childlessness requires both in-depth exploration of personal experiences and social meanings, as well as empirical analysis of demographic patterns and influencing factors. By integrating different methodological perspectives, the studies collectively provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the motivations, socio-cultural contexts, and psychological dimensions that shape the decision to remain childfree.

Table 3: Supplementary Data

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description/Findings	References
Type of Motivations for Childfree Decision	Personal Freedom Career Finances Environment Relationship Focus	Studies explore motivations such as freedom, career goals, financial security, health concerns, and relationships.	8 articles (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023; Buhr & Huinink, 2017; Donath et al., 2022; Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Štambuk et al., 2019; Stegen et al., 2021; Szalma & Takács, 2015)
Type of Experiences	Emotional Social Marital Psychological Well-being	Emotional impacts (ambivalence, regret, acceptance), marital dynamics, psychological well-being, social experiences.	7 articles (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023; Donath et al., 2022; Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Štambuk et al., 2019; Stegen et al., 2021; Szalma & Takács, 2015)
Societal & Cultural Contexts	Cultural Norms Religion Gender Roles Policies Media Potrayals	Religious teachings, gender norms, legal policies, societal pressures, and media narratives shaping childfree choices.	7 articles (Abdul Jafar et al., 2023; Donath et al., 2022; Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Štambuk et al., 2019; Stegen et al., 2021; Szalma & Takács, 2015)
Coping & Intersectionality	Social Support Managing Stigma Demographic Factor	Social support networks, strategies for stigma management, intersectionality (e.g., LGBTIQ, age, marital status).	6 articles (Donath et al., 2022; Peterson & Engwall, 2019; Sekine et al., 2021; Štambuk et al., 2019; Stegen et al., 2021; Szalma & Takács, 2015)

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (RECUKM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

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